Dynacord P-20 Dig

Dynacord's latest entry in the digital drum synth/MIDI world is its model *P-20*. The *P-20* brain has six channels and 24 internal digital sounds. Five of the channels have plug-in module sockets, enabling access of one additional digital sound per channel, giving a grand total of 29 available on-board sounds. The *P-20* will store 99 drumkits in memory (nine factory preset kits and 90 programmable kits).

The front panel of the brain contains the channel arrangement: Bass Drum, Snare, Tom 1, Tom 2, Tom 3, plus an Effects channel (actually "Miscellaneous"). The five drum channels have four internal sounds each, described as "Natural," "Electric," "Rock," and "Power." The sixth channel contains rim click, handclap, cowbell, and closed hi-hat. Channels 1 through 5 can also each access a module

cartridge sound, of which there are over 100 presently available from Dynacord. Stock modules included when you buy the kit are reverb bass drum, gated snare, high bongo, low bongo, and jazz crash cymbal. Unlike some other sound modules, the Dynacord modules only contain one sample each. Choices include acoustic and electronic drums, reverbed and gated drums, cymbals, percussion, and sound effects—all digitally recorded. The modules are, of course, interchangeable in the *P-20's* sockets, enabling any sort of configuration you want between the channels.

I should mention at this point that the main thrust of the *P-20* is its MIDI capability, since it also functions as a MIDI-to-drum and drum-to-MIDI converter. If you're set up for MIDI performance, lots of the *P-20's* features will be appealing. But more on that later.

The brain is rack-mountable (as is everything nowadays), and aside from the module sockets, has a trigger LED for each channel, separate volumes for each, a master volume control, headphone jack, digital LED windows at each channel to show which sound you've selected, a larger LED window that provides programming information, and a block of push buttons. Buttons numbered 1 through 6 are used to hear each sound in your selected kit (without having to strike the drumpads) while in the Play mode, and also to select the channel you want to edit while in Program mode. The other buttons on the panel select various stages of programming channels or MIDI information, store a kit in memory, and select the kit number to play or edit.

On the back of the unit, there are separate 1/4" trigger inputs and outputs, 1/4" stereo and mono mix outputs, jacks for MIDI In, Thru and Out, and a 15-pin Multi-Trigger jack (which can be used for Dynacord's *Rhythm Stick* [reviewed *MD:* Jan. '87]). There are also jacks for the connection of two different remote selectors. Each channel also has its own trim pot for sensitivity adjustments.

Programming

Programming the *P-20* kit is not as involved as other units, since the parameters forming the digital sounds themselves cannot be controlled. What you do is edit an existing kit program, and then transfer the newly edited program to another memory location. There are two basic stages of editing: the channel itself, and MIDI operations and effects. Using the two "Edit"

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buttons, you select the kit number you want to edit. These buttons cycle the program number either up or down to arrive at the location wanted. One aspect of this is that the kit numbers do not continuously cycle around; the display halts at kit number 99. So if you want to get back to kit 01, you have to go backwards through all the numbers. (It only takes a few seconds but is nonetheless disturbing to me.)

Once you've found the kit you want to edit, you can select the sound sample or the MIDI Out channel desired for each of the six channels, program each sample's volume in the kit (via the individual controls), and choose from one of nine different echo/delay effects that are variable for each channel. When working with the unit, I could not find a way to hear the sounds or echo settings while editing. I had to wait until after the new kit was stored. I basically had to edit kits through trial and error. (The owner's manual says nothing about this problem.)

The second editing section is where the *P-20* really shines: MIDI programming. In fact, three of the *P-20's* effects only operate at MIDI Out, so if you're *not* running a MIDI interface, they're worthless to you.

"Invert Dynamics" enables a soft stroke to be played loud and a loud stroke to be played soft. This could come into use when blending two sounds. For example, a Simmons drum can be connected to MIDI Out and the sound altered by the velocity of your stroke. A soft stroke could make the Dynacord sound, while a hard stroke would make the Simmons sound (or both could be mixed together).

The Pitch effect converts stroke velocity to pitches. By altering the power of your stroke, one pad can produce nine different pitches. The Chord effect enables a choice of nine three-note chords to be played, instead of the MIDI note selected. Thus, string bursts, brass bursts, etc., are all possible. In addition to these effects, the parameters of MIDI In, Out, Note Number, and Program Change can be varied.

A special MIDI program can be called up that allows simultaneous activation of all internal samples and modules via MIDI, yielding six-note polyphony. Triggering via a MIDI sequencer, keyboard, etc., can give many sound possibilities.

Sounds

"So how are the drum sounds?" you ask. Really great! All the *P-20* sounds are clear (since they're digital), pretty noise-free, and useful in a variety of musical settings. My personal favorites are the "Rock" snare and bass, the "Power" toms (the "Phil Collins sound"), and the stock module bass and snare (a "modern" studio sound). The module cymbal is also nice, and doesn't cut out quickly, since Dynacord's sound modules are capable of a five-second sample time. The fun thing about all this is that you're able to combine kit sounds to make "custom" drumkits. For instance, an electrified kick drum, gated snare, two power toms, a rock floor tom, and cowbell could make up one of your 99 kits. However, the sound capabilities are increased many times over when used with MIDI!

The Drumpads

Five Dynacord *Power Pads* come with the *P-20* kit. They have red plastic shells and are rubber-surfaced. The best analogy I can give for their shape is a "stretched-out square" (or maybe a "mutated parallelogram"). Each pad has a 1/4" input jack with a locking mechanism to ensure that the cable isn't inadvertently unplugged during performance. The *Power Pads* have internal drumkey-operated clamps, which enable them to fit any 7/8" tom-tom arm. I really like the feel of the *Power Pads;* they're responsive and have a natural rebound.

The *Power Kick* pad is a free-standing post with a rubber striking block (which "gives" a bit when you're playing). The pad has two large, angled steel legs that bolt onto the sides of the post. These legs contain small feet that can be adjusted up or down to compensate for uneven setup surfaces or large pedals. At the base of the post are two sprung spike spurs and a steel pedal mount plate with an adhesive rubber strip (which kept coming off). On the side of the post is a small trigger sensitivity switch that adjusts the *Power Kick* for soft or normal/heavy playing, as well as to prevent double triggering. The *Power Kick* is extremely stable and has a nice feel. Acoustically though, the pad is quite loud, even when played with a felt beater.

The Dynacord *P-20* brain is available alone for $1,699, or with the complete kit—including pads and cables—for $2,449. The sound module cartridges are $45 and $60, depending on the one you want (and its storage capacity). An optional footswitch selector is $80, and if you really want to go first-class, a remote, stand-mounted program selector box is available for $195. This accessory has a small, drumstick-strikeable pad on each end and a digital readout window in the middle, and performs the same function as the two forward/backward select buttons on the brain.

The *P-20* performs at its utmost when used in a MIDI setup. If you're *never going* to use MIDI, then there are other units on the market that just produce drum sounds. Internal voice programming on the *P-20* is limited, since envelopes, decays, pitches, etc., cannot be altered. But the burnt-in sounds are all great, and the possibilities when used with MIDI are quite vast—allowing expansion of the drumkit with a multitude of voices. Run to your Dynacord dealer for a full demo, or contact the new distributors of Dynacord in the U.S., Drum Workshop, at 2697 Lavery Court, Unit 16, Newbury Park, CA 91320.